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CHALLENGE

FIGHT FOR COMMUNISM • LUCHE POR EL COMUNISMO • PLP

THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST NEWSPAPER OF PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

Angry Axle Strikers Slam Pro-Boss Union Sellouts

DETROIT, May 18 — "Good morning brothers and sisters. First, let me say…" "No! First let ME say, this is BULLSHIT!" is the way a woman worker interrupted a UAW International rep at a standing-room-only meeting of American Axle (AAM) strikers. Over 1,000 black, Latin and white strikers packed the King H.S. auditorium to hear the UAW explain the tentative settlement to the 12-week-old strike, and to give them a piece of their mind.

"Bullshit," "Liar," "Sellout," and "Who do you work for, them or us?" peppered the two-hour meeting as UAW leaders read a 19-page summary of a four-year contract that will slash wages and benefits for current workers, eliminate 1,000 jobs and close two forges. Many of these workers are the higher earners in extended families that have been devastated by racist cutbacks and plant closings. They have fought not just for their own immediate families, but for the many others who depend on their wages.

A few workers tore up the summary and tossed it over the balcony. Workers cheered as the contract fell like confetti. One worker repeatedly warned those around him, "You better vote this down. I'm going to make more [when I'm] retired than you will working every day." A woman shouted, "Bullshit, bullshit," at UAW President Gettlefinger. When he demanded respect, another worker told her, "Go ahead. He ain't nobody!" When the UAW International VP handling American Axle rose to speak, a striker yelled, "Sit your fat ass down before I bust out the windows on your Cadillac!" He and those around him weren't playing.

Production workers' wages will be cut from about $24/hr to $18/hr. Some reclassified jobs will drop to $10/hr! Fork-lift and tug drivers drop to $12/hr. Health insurance payments will rocket to over $100-a-month with deductibles as high as $2,500 for family coverage, with less coverage overall. Pensions will be frozen, replaced by a 401(k). New hires will start at $11.50/hr, with a minimum of three years to reach "top pay" of $14.04.

For those retiring after January 1, 2009, healthcare benefits will be capped at $10,000 annually if one is pre-Medicare and $7,500 annually if receiving Medicare. For family coverage, retirees will have more than $100-a-month deducted from their pension checks and face annual deductibles as high as $1,500.

GM, the big winner in this struggle, is underwriting more than $220 million for AAM in buyouts and other expenses. The major auto bosses have been outsourcing production for decades to drive down labor and production costs. This process was greatly accelerated when Japanese and German automakers began expanding production here and grabbing big chunks of the U.S. auto market. It has accelerated even more with the shifting of auto production to China and India, driving down wages still further. This international imperialist rivalry among the bosses for markets, resources and cheap labor is bringing fascism and war to the world's workers.

The bosses are offering workers the "choice" of a $140,000 "buyout," to leave the company for good, or a $90,000 "buy-down" over four years, to accept the wage-cut. They will also get a $5,000 "signing bonus" ratification bribe.

Despite the overwhelming anger and disgust with the union leadership (or maybe because of it), the contract has a good chance of passing. Firstly, workers know that the UAW leadership won't bring back anything better. Even if they reject it, the workers are not organized to challenge the leadership for control of the strike. Without a company-wide organized opposition in the union, ready to break the laws, stop scabs, spread the strike here and in Mexico, and reach out to the rest of the working class, workers would be hard-pressed to take on AAM, GM and the UAW.

For that new leadership to emerge, workers must develop a revolutionary consciousness that rejects the choices of buyouts or buy-downs; an anti-racist international outlook that unites workers across all borders and rejects sacrificing for the bosses' profits.

During the strike, PLP renewed old friendships and made new ones. We visited workers in their homes, walked the picket lines and distributed CHALLENGE and PLP leaflets. A small number of Axle strikers attended May Day in Detroit and Chicago. Out of this bitter defeat for the workers, revolutionary communist leadership can take root. Communist ideas are the science of revolution, and class is in session.✪

MURDER BY UNEMPLOYMENT

Capitalism kills in many ways — imperialist wars, racist cops, inadequate healthcare. But there is a killer it generates which is somewhat hidden but nevertheless sends hundreds of thousands of workers to an early grave (millions over centuries) — joblessness.

Unemployment is a fact of life under the profit system. In its 400-year existence, there NEVER has been a time when the working class has been fully employed. There is always a "business cycle," boom and bust, recession after recession, and periodic depressions. Capitalists by their very nature must seek maximum profits to stay ahead of their competitors. One primary tool is cutting costs. And one of the main "cost-cutters" is laying off workers, both during "downturns" and "prosperity."

Neither Obama nor Clinton nor McCain can reverse this fact of capitalism. Rather, these multi-millionaires' role is to defend and enforce that system, ensuring that the bosses firmly control the government in order to pursue maximum profits, whether at home or abroad. Unemployment cannot be "reformed" away. The bosses depend on it, for use as a club over the head of those still employed, threatening to "close the plant" and move to lower-wage areas, or simply lay them off and hire "replacements" (scabs) if they don't accede to the bosses' demands.

A 1976 Congressional study attempted to "estimate the cost in human suffering of people being out of work." (NY Times, 10/31/76) From 40 years of statistics (1933 to 1973), that study concluded that every 1.4% rise in unemployment in 1970 led directly to the death of 30,000 workers over the following five years: strokes, heart and kidney ailments, 26,440; suicides, 1,540; homicides, 1,740; cirrhosis of the liver, 870. And that's from every 1.4% rise. The true rate of unemployment now is at least 13% or more, which could mean that the 1.4%/30,000-death figure would climb nearly ten-fold, to nearly 300,000, over a five-year period!

Moreover, the study found that infant mortality rates show dramatic increases within one to two years of a recession. Johns Hopkins University professor Harvey Brenner testified that, "The national rate of suicide…can be viewed

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From Burma to China to Katrina: Capitalism, Imperialism Are Unnatural Disasters

The hypocrisy of U.S. rulers knows no bounds. To capitalize on the sympathies of workers everywhere concerned about the millions affected by Cyclone Nargis in Burma (also called Myanmar), the bosses are playing their "humanitarian" card in order to fend off Chinese imperialists' influence in that country in their fight over energy resources. The Clinton administration played that same card under cover of stopping "ethnic cleansing" in Yugoslavia to secure oil and gas pipelines from central Asia. That "humanitarian" effort ended with the establishment of a massive U.S. base in Kosovo encompassing 7,000 military personnel. Now it is attempting the same ploy in Burma.

Yet somehow U.S. bosses' "humanitarianism" never extended to the victims of Hurricane Katrina right here in their backyard. In covering the Burma disaster (as well as China's quake), the media downplay obvious parallels to Katrina. The same capitalist forces, unwilling to sacrifice almighty profit for public safety and with utter disregard for workers' lives, were at work in New Orleans. And there, racism, U.S rulers' favorite weapon, multiplied the death and destruction still further.

Burmese Workers' Lives Worthless to Bosses with Energy Profits at Stake

In Burma, of western energy companies, only Chevron and France's Total have big operations. They help run the Yadanas gas project, the Burmese ruling-class junta's largest source of income, with yearly sales topping $2 billion. When the storm struck, Chevron and Total each donated $2 million to the Red Cross, one of the very few outside groups working with the Burmese government. Such "aid" helps to ensure their continuing participation in the Yadanas deal. Chevron has a 28% share in it; Total has 31%.

Besides the 128,000 killed by the cyclone, over two million survivors risk starvation and deadly diseases like cholera and malaria. Citing "sovereignty," Burma's military dictatorship, allied with China, is blocking relief workers and supplies from other countries. By barring foreigners, even during a disaster, the ruling generals seek to limit outsiders (other than Chinese) from cashing in on the country's vast natural gas fields.

U.S. Imperialists Hope High Burma Death Toll will Justify Military Strike

While Chevron's bosses may be content with their Burma racket, the broader class of major U.S capitalists wants dominance, not junior partnership with two-bit Burmese dictators or French oil barons. U.S. rulers (along with their British allies) and their strategists seek to exploit Burma's gas and oil fields directly and drive out the growing presence of rival Chinese firms Sinopec and PetroChina. They cynically hope that the carnage in Burma will justify military intervention and lead to eventual regime change.

Britain's influential Economist magazine (5/15/08) coldly calculated that "if, say, a third of the 2m[illion] now struggling to survive in Myanmar were to die in the coming week from hunger and disease because their government refused outside" help a "crime against humanity" would result, grounds for U.S. Navy helicopters to breach Burma's borders and drop relief supplies. Warning that "the aircraft doing the dropping might be fired on unless they had military escorts, and that might lead to more fighting than anyone should want to see in a disaster zone," the Economist concludes, "the attempt is worth making."

The Rockefeller-led Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the leading U.S. imperialist think-tank agrees: "Sovereignty provides no license for inexcusable behavior. The time has come to act." (CFR website, 3/15/08) Of course, the savage 2½-year non-response to the plight of hundreds of thousands of mostly black residents of New Orleans is somehow "excusable."

U.S rulers' response to the Burma crisis reveals a trend towards cloaking armed intervention in liberal, humanitarian garb. Faced with drastic ground-force shortfalls and future conflicts bigger than Iraq and Afghanistan, they need to enlist more troops and broader public support for their war machine. Harvard professor Samantha Powers, Barack Obama's chief foreign policy advisor ("officially" fired for leaking his plan for permanently occupying Iraq, but still working behind the scenes) plots U.S. military "humanitarian" deployments in places like Darfur and Burma.

Ruling-class-led groups such as billionaire George Soro's Human Rights Watch, which backed Bill Clinton's bombing of Serbia and decries Burma's dictatorship, help win well-meaning people to the U.S. war agenda. The liberal interventionist invokes a noble-sounding U.N. principle, "the responsibility to protect." But invasions, in fact, kill workers to protect capitalists' bottom lines.

A Sad Reversal of Red 'Serve-the-People' Politics

Unlike Burma's isolationists, Chinese leaders have been very open about the recent earthquakes in Sichuan province. For now, until they build up capital and armed forces sufficient to challenge the U.S. head-on, China's bosses welcome foreign investment and thus media attention. To attract dollars and euros, they have created history's largest low-wage paradise. While reporters gush over how helpful Chinese authorities have been, profit reigns supreme and workers' needs go neglected.

Cheap construction that saved the bosses a few bucks murdered thousands of children. The NY Times reported (5/15/08), "Six schoolhouses collapsed in the city [of Juyan], even as other government buildings remain standing." A half-century ago China's leaders, striving to put communist theory into practice, made the well-being of the people the highest priority. In the 1950's Red China mobilized virtually its entire population in digging up the snails that spread the debilitating schistosomiasis epidemic. And they won millions of workers and peasants to participate in a massive construction project, mostly working by hand, which diverted the Yangtze River from centuries-old flooding.

Storms, floods and earthquakes are part of nature. But, capitalism, which, time and again fails to do what readily can be done to protect workers from these disasters while using them to justify imperialist war, must be destroyed. Building the international PLP is the one sure road to eliminating the unnatural disaster of the profit system. ✪

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR:

✭Progressive Labor Party (PLP) fights to smash capitalism — wage slavery. While the bosses and their mouthpieces claim "communism is dead," capitalism is the real failure for billions all over the world.

✭Capitalism returned to the Soviet Union and China because socialism failed to wipe out many aspects of the profit system, like wages and division of labor.

✭Capitalism inevitably leads to wars. PLP organizes workers, students and soldiers to turn these wars into a revolution for communism — the dictatorship of the proletariat. This fight requires a mass Red Army led by the communist PLP.

✭Communism means working collectively to build a society where sharing is based on need. We will abolish work for wages, money and profits. Everyone will share in society's benefits and burdens.

✭Communism means abolishing racism and the concept of race.

✭Communism means abolishing the special oppression of women.

✭Communism means abolishing nations and nationalism. One International working class, one world, one Party.

✭Communism means the Party leads every aspect of society. For this to work, millions of workers — eventually everyone — must become communist organizers. Join Us!

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MURDER BY UNEMPLOYMENT

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as…an economic indicator," so close is the link between joblessness and workers' violent deaths.

So while economists and pundits debate whether the U.S. is or isn't in a recession, tens of thousands of workers are dying from the disease of joblessness. This is doubly true for black and Latino workers who, because of racism, suffer twice the unemployment rate of white workers.

So when GM, Ford and Chrysler lay off hundreds of thousands of auto workers, leading to thousands of deaths from the above causes, no murder indictments are brought against those bosses. "That's just capitalism."

Mass unemployment, and especially its racist component, is thus one of the biggest killers capitalism has created. One more reason to destroy it with communist revolution and erect a system without bosses and profits, in which everyone works to the best of their ability and commitment, a society that eliminates the word and concept of "unemployment."✪

Latinos Among Hardest HiT

Nazi-type raids by ICE (Immigration police) blame immigrant workers for capitalism's current crisis and terrorizes them to accept second-class wages and working conditions to pay for the bosses' crisis and endless profit wars. This two-pronged attack is aimed at ALL workers, since the entire working class is suffering rising unemployment (see adjoining article), the housing crisis and gasoline and food price-hikes.

Latino workers are among the hardest hit by capitalism's economic crisis, both in jobs and earnings, "imposing a particularly punishing toll on Hispanics….and…has given way to growing joblessness, diminishing paychecks and lost homes." (NY Times, 5/13, and all following quotes) Racism forced Latinos into the hardest and lowest-paying jobs, being among the first to be dumped by the profit system.

"The boom in American housing generated…jobs for those….doing much of the unpleasant work shunned by those with better prospects. But now significant portions of this work are disappearing." Latinos "are concentrated in an industry [construction] that is leading the downturn," slashing already meager earnings and leading to home foreclosures.

From April 2007 to this past April, "The unemployment rate among Hispanics spiked…to 6.9 percent," while "the overall jobless rate rose…to 5 percent." Of course, as the accompanying editorial reveals, these fraudulent rates are at least half the true rate. Latino joblessness probably exceeds 14%.

"For…nearly 19 million Latino immigrants…the downturn has cut significantly into earnings, dropping the share of those sending money home to families in Latin America from nearly three-fourths…to about half." So "one in 12 of the mortgages made to Latino households in 2005 and 2006 is likely to fail. Why? Because, "By 2006, 47 percent of the loans issued… [to] Hispanics were subprime, nearly the double the rate for non-Hispanic whites….Only African-Americans leaned harder on subprimes."

Such is life in these racist, profit-driven United States.✪

Campus Sit-in Growing into Mass Fight Against Cuts, War

LOS ANGELES, CA May 8th — May While the ruling class is trying to slam the working class with huge racist cuts in education, healthcare, and social services, the students at our university have been part of a mass fight-back against these attacks. A few weeks ago, a group of over 120 students walked out of their classes and occupied the University President's office for five hours. Students discussed the nature of the budget cuts and linked these attacks to a system that has nothing good to offer the working class. This may seem like a spontaneous action, but the anger among students has certainly been building up for a while. The Party has leafleted against the cuts, the war and the capitalist system, calling for action and the long-term struggle for revolution, and sold CHALLENGE on the campus.

Clearly, the attacks on the working class are intensifying class anger; students here have not only been angry about budget cuts but also about its links to the war in Iraq, the building of prisons as well as the massive healthcare cutbacks affecting their families, "We aren't having a real conversation about the budget cuts if we're not linking it to the war," said one student. "Politicians don't understand our suffering like we do," said another making it clear that this isn't going to be a movement for students looking to build careers as politicians, much less pander to elected officials' lies.

Over the course of a few weeks, what started out as a sit-in organized by students from a few social science classes has slowly been turning into a mass movement involving students, professors, and staff from different organizations and different departments across campus. In the course of the struggle, the administration of the university has exposed its true nature and its undeniable allegiance to the capitalist class. They have been trying to pacify us by telling us that we are "preaching to the choir" and that it's a matter of pressuring elected representatives. Meanwhile, the administration has been targeting students involved in the struggle, threatening to suspend them from school. The students' response has been to denounce this move, saying that an attack against one student is an attack on everyone involved, whether student, professor or staff.

The energetic and committed involvement of many people on our campus shows the potential for building a movement that targets the core of these attacks: the capitalist system. The Party has been active in this struggle; although we have been a bit timid about openly raising the need for communism we have been raising this with our friends and making strides to correct our timidity. Many involved in this struggle came to the May Day march and were impressed with all the red flags.



Our next goals are to increase hand-to-hand as well as mass distribution of CHALLENGE, coupled with study groups to guide our practice on campus. One of the next steps is to get the students on our campus to form alliances with the rest of the working class, who must turn these difficult times into opportunities to build for a revolution that will get rid of a system reliant on war, budget cuts, and the exploitation of all workers. ✪

Rally Raps Budget Cuts, Immigration Raids, Iraq War

LOS ANGELES, MAY 19 – Around 250 students came to a rally against budget cuts despite the intense heat. Some speakers wanted to pressure the administration with demands, others discussed fascist attacks and ICE terror raids. Yet another speaker connected the budget cuts to the war budget, saying that the war in Iraq is against the interests of students and workers everywhere and that we should all unite against the racist cuts.

Many students are disillusioned with electoral politics and understand that wider connections must be made, not only to the prison budget, but also to the war budget. Many students chanted "No Cuts, No More, The Cuts are for the war," reflecting this sentiment. We distributed about 150 CHALLENGES and 400 PL leaflets to students. This struggle will continue. ✪

Red Chants Resound in Downtown Bogotá on May Day

BOGOTA, COLOMBIA — As reported in CHALLENGE (5/21), PLP was modestly successful in mobilizing for the union-led May Day march here of 75,000 workers and youth. Our 100-strong PLP-led group, mainly comprising young workers and students, distributed thousands of communist leaflets and hundreds of DESAFIOS. Our chants were heard throughout downtown Bogotá, promoting pro-communist internationalism and attacking capitalism, imperialism and the paramilitary death-squad fascist Uribe government here (U.S. imperialism's most loyal ally in the region). Over 20 people joined our contingent during the march.

Contrary to the unions and fake-leftists, rather than merely "celebrating" the holiday, PLP advances May Day as a day of fighting back for the international interests of the working class, not to beg crumbs from the ruling class. We don't ask the "international community" (read, the UN, human rights groups, etc.) to end the murder of workers and youth, the oppression of our class or the vicious war waged by the paramilitary death squads led by the government and its army. They have killed over 2,400 union activists in the last 20 years, some of them paid by imperialist corporations like Coca-Cola, Chiquita Brands, Dole, Del Monte and Drummond Mining.

Workers and youth are mad as hell. During the march, they attacked the internal war and the war in Iraq, the Free Trade Agreement Uribe and Bush aim to sign to exploit the working class even more. But what's lacking is a revolutionary alternative to this capitalist-imperialist hell. The trade union hacks, fake leftists and guerrillas don't offer that alternative.

We in PLP have a long way to go to provide that alternative, but we're on the right road. As Lenin said in 1905 in Russia, the cataclysm of war doesn't create revolution out of nothing. Revolutionary communists here and internationally, as well as the working class, have a lot of obstacles to overcome, but we won't get anywhere following the old recycled line of workers' management of capitalism, "people's democracy" or "national liberation." The only road for real liberation for workers and their allies is communist revolution. Join PLP and make that long road shorter!✪

Brooklyn Walkout Correction

(Due to our error, the following paragraphs from the page-3 article in the May 21st CHALLENGE on Brooklyn H.S. walkouts protesting the racist education budget cuts and the acquittal of the kkkops who assassinated Sean Bell were either omitted or appeared incorrectly).

One student overheard a dean calling students "idiots and stupid" for planning a walkout, and ordered "safety agents"/cops to lock them in. But student pressure forced the agents to unlock the doors.

FASCISM 101

At another school, an announcement heard repeatedly on May 1 morning warned that, "Any student who walks out of the school will be suspended for a Level III infraction." Some students were told they would get three-month suspensions while others were threatened with ouster from special programs. Teachers were ordered to report any students who walked out. Hundreds still tried to walk out, but security guards were assigned to block all exits and cops were called.

Despite all this, some students did walk. Rather than being discouraged, some students want to continue organizing. Some teachers refused to "name names." One teacher submitted a list that included famous revolutionaries and leaders of slave revolts. Another just wrote, "I refuse" on his sheet. Teachers and students plant to intensify activities with regular agitation and meetings around the Sean Bell murder and the cutbacks.

Hospital Workers Blast Racist KKKop Killers of Sean Bell

BROOKLYN, NY, April 25 — Hospital workers protested this morning's not guilty verdict for three plainclothes cops who fired 50 bullets into an unarmed black man, Sean Bell, leaving his bachelor party. One comrade circulated an e-mail to friends to protest outside the hospital at noon. Word of mouth spread the message.

Within an hour a dozen stood to protest. They held hand-made signs with strong messages: "Killer Cops' Innocence Means the System is Racist"; and, "Sean Bell's Murder Here, Imperialist War There, the Same Racism."

The group comprised white, black and Latino, young and old. A bystander on the street stood with us. When the hospital's Chief of Police came out to intimidate us, we stood firm. Workers unable to leave at noon sent us solidarity messages.

This action was built from a larger one called earlier in the year to support the Jena, Louisiana students, victimized by racism.

Today was the first day of demonstrating for some. Such protests must spread to every job site. Mass mobilizations of workers at the point of production and then taken to the streets have the power to spark anti-racist rebellions which, with red leadership, can build communist class consciousness and help lead to a revolution that will banish racist murders and the cops along with them. ✪

Racist Anti-Immigrant Gangs Betray Anti-Apartheid Fight

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, May 19 — "Shock" is the expression being used after the eruption of violence on a scale not seen since the end of apartheid. "Anger at substantial immigrant populations — fellow blacks mainly from Zimbabwe and Mozambique — has seen at least 22 people killed in the past week since the first incidents in the northern Johannesburg township of Alexandra. The killing has now spread through the country like wild-fire…" (London Times online, 5/19)

The violent anti-immigrant pogrom has been fueled by the same lies directed against immigrants in Europe and the U.S. — they "steal jobs, cause crime," etc. Racist gangs have employed the weapons used against traitors during the anti-Apartheid era, like "neck-lacing" (burning tires around victims' necks).

This racist violence is not "shocking" if we understand the real cause. Racism and inequality are universal aspects of capitalism, from Paris to London to New York to Johannesburg.

Since the African National Congress (ANC) took power following the dismantlement of the old apartheid regime, the lives of some black politicians and petit-bourgeois elements have improved, but life is harder for the majority of black workers. Last year, mass workers' strikes reflected this situation. "People are having to find scapegoats, this is about competition for diminishing resources.... President Mbeki has tried to de-racialise the economy but only a very small number at the top have really benefited," said Sipho Seephe, President of the South Africa Institute of Race Relations. (London Times) "Some 40 percent of the population — 80 percent of which is black — is little better off than at the end of apartheid in 1994."

Another important lesson is that there is no half-way solution to the evils of a worldwide capitalist system involved in endless wars, continuing economic crises and the need to divide and super-exploit more and more workers to reap super-profits. Once the imperialists and capitalists realized the old apartheid regime couldn't control South Africa's angry workers and youth, the ANC came to power. Nelson Mandela, Mbeki and Jacob Zuma (the next President) — supported by the "Communist" Party of South Africa (with a substantial base among its most militant workers and youth because of the "C"P's role in fighting apartheid) — became capitalism's managers. They provided some cosmetic changes but without changing the essence of racist exploitation.

Zwelinzima Vavi , leader of the COSATU union federation, spoke at a protest organized by the ANC-CP-led federation outside parliament. He said it's not the Zimbawean exiles causing the problems



for poor South Africans, even blaming capitalism. But only 100 people protested, showing the lack of credibility of COSATU, which since 1994 has supported the ANC governments and its free-market capitalist policies, and now backs the new ANC President Zuma.

The racist gangs are murdering immigrant workers in the same townships where heroic battles against apartheid were waged in the past, a direct product of these sellouts' pro-capitalist policies. Now the struggle to build a society without racism and capitalism is now more difficult than ever. But it's the only struggle which will eventually extricate workers here and worldwide, out of this capitalist-created hell. ✪

Texas May Day Shows Workers Need Unity, Not Borders

TEXAS — May Day was a modest success for our group in this state. Our May Day dinner was organized by young teachers, workers and students with a program of speeches and music, good food and lively discussion that focused heavily on the role of education under capitalism. Later, many of us attended our city's Immigrants Rights march, where we had an opportunity to show how communist ideas and action make possible a true education in working-class politics.

At the rally we distributed over 300 flyers exposing the liberal rulers' tactics of using promises of citizenship to recruit immigrants as cannon fodder for U.S. imperialism. Our leaflet became the leading source of information for all participants and onlookers at this reformist march for immigrant rights. More importantly, as we marched with our friends, we discussed the need to smash capitalism's borders worldwide and struggle for communist revolution.

I was joined at the march by one of my students and her sister. We talked about the capitalist purpose of borders and the need for workers to unite across them. The heavy police presence also sparked discussion of police brutality and why cops were enemies of the working class; they ultimately act in the interests of the bosses, killing thousands of workers worldwide in order to instill fear and hopelessness in working people.

Afterwards we went to dinner where we sharpened our understanding of the history of the U.S./Mexico border. During dinner someone mentioned the ruling-class propaganda that, without borders, millions of Mexicans would flood "our" streets and steal "our" jobs. I explained how the existing border had been created out of the southern U.S. slaveholders' effort to push slavery further west during an historical period when Mexico had outlawed slavery. We finally concluded that what was labeled independence by the ruling class was also the enslavement of the Mexican and black workers in the South.

During the march we had received a flyer announcing a protest at a prison in another city that jails immigrant families and many U.S.-born children. My student wanted to join the protest and is currently organizing others within the school to join us. These students are writing a leaflet calling for the need to unite workers and smash the bosses' borders. It will be really exciting to travel alongside my students in support of immigrant rights and ultimately communist revolution! ✪

Protest Fascist Minutemen at DePaul U



CHICAGO, May 19 — PLP brought several dozen workers and students to the rally against the racist Minutemen founder Chris Simcox at DePaul University here. Simcox was invited by the right-wing DePaul Conservative Alliance. Liberal pro-immigrant students organized students to protest his appearance. But only PLP tied the Minutemen's racist ant-immigrant attacks to the bigger picture of U.S. capitalism in crisis.

The rally's high point came when a new younger friend of the Party led the crowd to denounce a sign-carrying racist who stood near us, leading the cops to whisk him away to save his skin.

Our contingent distributed almost 200 CHALLENGES and 500 leaflets, as well as making six contacts. ✪

CORRECTION

The May 7 issue on the California Teachers Convention (page 5) said, "Delegates were urged to get 1% of their local membership to walk precincts for the November 2008 elections." Due to a typographical error, the next sentence said, "We should aim to win 100% to become CHALLENGE readers!" The original article said, "1% to become CHALLENGE readers!"

More May Day Reports from Around the World

OAXACA, MÉXICO

A PLP group participated in the annual May Day march held in downtown Oaxaca. Thousands marched, particularly teachers and farmworkers, showing their disgust with the government and the capitalist system it represents.

Our group distributed 600 flyers with our communist analysis of capitalist exploitation, and we put up 100 posters walls around the march reading "A system that creates inequality, wars, racism and exploitation must be destroyed." We also distributed 50 copies of DESAFIO.

Our participation was modest, but we are already making plans to increase our efforts in future activities, including May Day 2009. The working class and its allies here, and worldwide, need a revolutionary alternative to a system which only breeds hunger, wars among drug cartels and a dim future for humanity.

PAKISTAN

Greetings from revolutionary communists in Pakistan. Our PLP group had a great May Day here, with comrades involved in many activities. Our communist ideas were well-received. We made new friends as more and more workers and their allies are becoming disillusioned with the fakers on the "left" who offer no solutions to a capitalist-imperialist system breeding endless wars for profits under the cover of religion, "democracy," etc. ✪

Coal Barons, Gov't Guilty of Murdering Miners

When six miners died in the Crandall Canyon Mine in Utah last August 6, it was no "accident" — it was deliberate murder for profit. Ten days later three more workers died from a tunnel collapse while trying to rescue those six. All nine deaths were completely avoidable.

The mine owner, Robert Murray, claimed it was due to an "earthquake." This lie was exposed in a recent Congressional report, but don't hold your breath expecting anything will be done by the bosses' politicians to prevent future murders.

Murray's operation practices "retreat mining." This method involves removing the massive coal pillars that support the mine's roof. As miners move backwards towards the entrance, this allows sections of the mine to collapse, "the technique of doubling back to carve final profits from the coal pillars that brace the mine." (NY Times, 5/9) With coal prices soaring, the mine owners find it extremely profitable to extract every last bit of coal, over the dead bodies of the miners who dig out the coal.

In March 2007, a similar collapse occurred in the same mine, but the pillars and mine roof didn't fall on any miners. However, the Crandall bosses played down that incident, which should have led to the banning of retreat mining.

In fact, before the August disaster, miners — including one of the six who died — reported that sections of the mine floor had been buckling up from the intense pressure placed upon it. They said the mine bosses knew about the problem but continued operations anyway.

Then, on August 6, a series of pillars burst apart, causing a mine cave-in so powerful it registered 3.9 on the Richter scale. It killed the six miners, entombing them in the mine. Their bodies were never recovered. Three were immigrants from Mexico, forced by the bosses' racism to work on the more dangerous, unsafe jobs, a condition which then spreads to all workers. Ten days later, three more miners, working to reach the six who were trapped, were killed as well when a 1,500-foot section of the tunnel collapsed on them.

'Modern industry and armies can't run without oil.'

If the company had stopped this "retreat mining" after the March 2007 collapse, all these miners would be alive today. But the owners concealed the extent of that incident, leading to the August murders.

Now a big hue and cry is rising, from the Congressional report to NY Times' editorials, calling for a "criminal inquiry" and new safety laws. But the report itself upholds the legitimacy of "retreat mining." And the Mine Safety and Health Administration is notorious for being run by pro-industry appointees, who have done next to nothing about enforcing current laws. The "worst" that happens is a slap on the wrist for mine owners' violations.

Some coal bosses say domestic coal could become an "alternative" fuel to the U.S. rulers' dependence on imported oil from war-torn regions and anti-U.S. governments. Daydreaming! Modern industry and armies can't run without oil. Besides, the biggest U.S. bosses, like Exxon-Mobil, make multi-billion-dollar profits from oil; the Pentagon itself is geared to preventing U.S. imperialist rivals from grabbing control of the flow of oil. But — oil or coal — capitalist industries' main goal is reaping maximum profits. Killing workers, including ignoring their safety, is part of that process. Only a communist society, where workers' lives are the first priority and the fruit of their labors will be shared by the whole working class, not a few profiteers, will end this carnage. ✪

FRANCE: Teachers' Strike in 130 Cities Against Gov't Cuts



BULLETIN May 19 — About 40,000 teachers and their supporters demonstrated in Paris yesterday. An inter-trade union federation meeting today proposed no action except to renew the call, initially launched by the French PTA, for a demonstration on May 24. It also ignores the high school students' protest movement. In short, most of the union "leaders" are doing everything they can to alienate the teachers' potential allies and keep the movement "manageable."

In such a situation, communists put forward organizing the widest possible support for striking teachers, forging the links necessary to help develop the revolutionary potential of the working class. ✪

PARIS, May 16 — Yesterday, according to the government's understated figures, 860,000 public workers struck against job cuts and government policies dismantling public services, demonstrating in over 130 cities. It was particularly strong in education, with over half of junior and senior high school teachers and nearly two-thirds of primary school teachers on strike. Large contingents of high school students livened up the protests.

In Marseilles and five other cities, teachers' general assemblies voted to renew their strike on May 19, in some cases over the opposition of the union leaders. They hope to spark a break with the ritual 24-hour protest strike.

Longer and more intense strikes are needed to force the government to back down from the 22,900 education job losses programmed in the 2008 budget. Indeed, President Nicolas Sarkozy's reaction to yesterday's walkout was to propose new strike-breaking laws to "protect" the "right to work."

The government's onslaught on public workers — which includes last year's elimination of special retirement plans for mainly rail workers performing particularly hard jobs — is not driven solely by budget-balancing needs, after giving the rich tax breaks of 222 million euros ($350 million) in 2007 (to increase this year). Privatizing public services is also part of the bosses' strategy to cut wages and benefits for ALL workers.

France's 5,000,000 public workers cannot be laid off or fired for union activity as easily as private-sector workers. They form the core of the French trade union movement. About 15% of public workers belong to unions, as against 5% of private-sector workers.

Given that French bosses are competing with rivals worldwide, they need to smash the French labor movement in order to maximize profits. For instance, while from 1996 to 2007, labor costs in Germany fell 5%, they rose 20% in France. (Charlie Hebdo, 5/7/2008) Nevertheless, with inflation, real wages in France have fallen 4.2% in the private sector and 7.0% in the public sector since 1994. (Council on Employment, Income and Social Cohesion)

Furthermore, French bosses are participating in on-going wars to re-divide the world. The French expeditionary force in Afghanistan now numbers 3,200 soldiers, and France is suspected of having tried to overthrow Sudan's government (Le Canard Enchaîné, 5/14/08). The bosses need a docile workforce on the home front.

Successful extension of the teachers' strike movement would build the May 22nd national strike called by all the major unions to protest government plans to increase the number of work-years needed for a full retirement pension. Previous pension "reform" laws have al-

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Anti-War Solidarity Actions Sweep CUNY Campuses

NEW YORK CITY, May 19 — On May Day, PLP members participated in events upholding workers' solidarity at multiple CUNY campuses. One of the campus unions, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), held rallies to celebrate the West Coast longshoreman's (ILWU) plan to organize an eight-hour work stoppage against the war. We were excited by this opportunity to show how class-conscious industrial workers can fight for more political demands (for a critical analysis of the ILWU May Day work-stoppage see report on the May Day activities in the Bay Area, CHALLENGE, May 21, 2008). At the events, we participated in various anti-war activities — bullhorn rallies, teach-ins, film showings and literature tables — and distributed CHALLENGE, which linked the war with the CUNY budget cuts. On one campus a dozen union members unfurled a 15-foot-long banner, "US Out of Iraq...No Attack on Iran!" in front of the cafeteria. As speakers explained the real reasons for the war on Iraq along with conditions here at home, a student called out, "What about the war in Palestine?" We invited him to join our discussion.

During another rally, a letter received early that May Day morning from the General Union of Port Workers of Iraq was read aloud (see box). Inspired by ILWU's actions in the U.S., the Iraqi unionists were planning to stop work in Umm Qasr and Al Zubair.

On a third campus, the administration refused to grant a sound permit. When speakers began to use a handheld bullhorn, campus security backed up by city cops swarmed in, threatening to arrest the chapter chair and the speaker. So much for free speech on campus. After these city-wide campus events, many students and union members went together to the Immigrants' Rights Rally in Union Square.

From these successful May Day actions the potential exists for building a strong worker-student alliance and to recruit new members to PLP. We will continue to be involved in struggles on our campuses to make this happen. ✪

(Excerpts from the May Day message from the Port Workers in Iraq to West Coast U.S. dock workers.)

In solidarity with the ILWU, the General Union of Port Workers in Iraq will stop work for one hour on May Day in the ports of Umm Qasr and Khor Al Zubair.

Dear Brothers and Sisters of ILWU in California:

The courageous decision you made to carry out a strike on May Day to protest against the war and occupation of Iraq advances our struggle against occupation to bring a better future for us and the rest of the world as well….[which] will only be created by the workers…. We in Iraq are looking up to, and support you until the victory over the U.S. administration's barbarism is achieved.

Over the past five years the sectarian gangs who are the product of the occupation have been trying to transfer their conflicts into our ranks. Targeting workers, including their residential and shopping areas, indiscriminately using all sorts of explosive devices, mortar shells, and random shooting, were part of a bigger scheme that was aiming to tear up the society…. We are struggling to defeat BOTH the occupation and the sectarian militias' agenda....

Long live the port workers in California! Long live May Day! Long live International solidarity!" ✪

LETTERS

Lauds May Day Youth

I have to first start by saying it was a very good experience for my family and me. I presently work at Rikers Island. I was very moved by the kids of all ages who were in attendance. I was blessed to be in their company. Kids who don't stand for anything will fall for everything. These multi-talented kids have a view of what is going on today which they showed in their performances. It is very important they realize how this world is going to be. I have never been moved by such a young and powerful group of kids. Kids need these events to express themselves.

My family and I would like to give special thanks to the PLP teacher and his wife that invited us to the powerful May Day event. Here's to the young and powerful kids of the future!

A Bronx Worker

'Thumbs up for Workers' State'

At the PLP May Day rally in NY, people were eager to take copies of CHALLENGE as we rallied. I distributed over 25 papers to observers. Many had never heard of May Day, but they responded positively to the idea of a workers' state. One man from Haiti talked about the starvation his family faced living there, and was looking for big changes!

At the dinner, a D.C. community organizer who attended her first PLP May Day praised the commitment and sincerity of the youth leading the program. She said, "You can tell they really own these ideas — they are not just repeating ideas heard from others!" Another first-time May Day marcher promised to come back next year and tell his friends about it.

D.C. Red

Working Class Has Only One Color — RED

We in NYC had many May Day activities. On May 1, we assembled at Cadman Plaza in Brooklyn, and later went to Union Square to march against the raids suffered by undocumented immigrants. On May 3, we participated in the PLP political dinner honoring May Day.

In Brooklyn and Union Square we chanted and agitated intensely, countering the conservative political tone given by many organizations in those events for immigrant rights. Before 200 demonstrators in Cadman Plaza, one Latino immigrant spoke militantly, saying: "We must stop those SS-like raids carried out by the immigration cops in the streets and workplaces."

He also opposed the racist verdict freeing three cops who killed Sean Bell and injured his two friends with 50 shots. He also attacked the racist education cuts affecting our youth, the future of our class. He declared that the soldiers in Iraq are killing and dying for the sake of imperialism.

He concluded with a bang: "The working class only has one color: the red of the blood spilled by the Martyrs of Chicago executed for demanding their just rights. We speak one language, the one of struggle against exploitation and discrimination. Workers of the world, unite!"

This was the opposite of what others push: that voting for the Democrats gives immigrant workers "better possibilities." Some also said praying was the solution. But the bosses only listen to the "prayers" of the big corporations like Exxon-Mobil and Halliburton.

The PLP May Day political dinner was in sharp contrast, with speeches, poems and music full of communist solutions to capitalism's racism, war and exploitation. And the best part of this great evening of good food and better politics was the leadership provided by Red youth. The future of our movement is in great hands.

An immigrant worker

Peru: Aim Workers' Anger At Class Enemy

Some of us participated in the "People's Summit Linking Alternatives" carried out to coincide with the ruling-class summit meeting held here in Lima, Peru, between Latin America's rulers and the European Union's imperialists. Some 6,000 people attended the alternative summit on the campus of the Univ. of Peru at Rimac. On May 16, a mass rally was held at Lima's May 2 Plaza.

Some of us exposed the conditions of the working class. This contrasted with the main positions at the meeting, plagued by nationalist and patriotic organizations. Some even wanted to return to the ancient "collective living of Tawantinsuyo (Inca empire)." There were also relatively small pseudo-leftist organizations who still believe Peru must go through the experiences which Hugo Chávez is bringing to Venezuela or Evo Morales to Bolivia. They think Cuba is following the road of "socialist construction."

What's evident is the lack of channeling workers' discontent against their class enemy. This is the challenge facing those of us trying to build a vanguard organization of the working class. We must go beyond our enormous limitations.

Friends in Lima



May Day in Los Angeles

Bosses' Pawns Can't Stop Students From Marching

On May 1st 2008, a group of South Central LA high school students boarded a rented bus at a nearby college campus. But there, waiting to intercept us, were a dozen cop cars led by some administrators and the fascist District President. "You need our approval before boarding the bus." "You all don't know what you're getting into and don't know any better." "My children should be in school. That's more important." Words of obvious fascism from the administrator were shared by the District President. So, after being harassed by the bosses' pawns, we all packed into the cars of our comrades and met up with the bus at a rendevous point. There, comrades from other locations joined us as we left for the immigrant rights march as a group. We overcame the circumstances and did not let the cops or the District President stop us.

A student May Day marcher

CHALLENGE Carries the Day

On May 1st, about 22 people from our school and people from another school boarded a bus. When everyone boarded the bus we were given a red shirt and a chant sheet. On the way, we started chanting to get some practice. A block away from the march we departed from the bus and people brought carts, empty backpacks and purses just to put CHALLENGE in. When we started chanting, people looked at us. Then many of us scattered and started to distribute CHALLENGE to everyone who was interested in it. The highlight of this story is the CHALLENGE committee to get out the paper to different people. We talked about the paper. We did a good job getting out the paper, and I'm proud of us for doing this successfully without any fight or threats from any of the people we offered the paper to.

A high school CHALLENGE seller

Reflections on May Day

"This is a result of our work," my brother said, referring to workers and students with red flags meeting in downtown Los Angeles to celebrate May Day.

My brother was happy, even tearful. "This cost our Party beatings, jail, deportations, and separating families, but here's the result — communist May Day lives — no matter how much the bosses want to destroy it." My brother was right. If not for PLP celebrating May Day in the U.S. since the 1970s as a revolutionary holiday in the long-term struggle for communism, it would have been forgotten here.

It's gratifying to know that when there's such a celebration, the first thing workers who were members of PLP — but are no longer active — do is look for PLP.

My 16-year-old daughter came to the dinner and wanted to participate in the Immigrant Rights march, but she also wanted to go to school. I'm sorry I didn't struggle hard enough with her because our part of the march was the best, most militant and the reddest, qualitatively better because of PLP's presence — those with the clearest, most profound and most political ideas, combating all nationalist, racist and anti-communist ideas.

Many in the march followed our leadership. While there were flags carried from every capitalist nation, the only flag that waved high during the whole march was the Red Flag of the Progressive Labor Party.

The street resonated with our chants — "See this fist! Workers to Power!" and "Workers' struggles have no borders." These slogans belong not only to PLP but to the working class. They were heard during the whole march, along with "Long live communism, death to capitalism."

We were together with millions and millions of workers who celebrate our day. With thousands, and potentially millions, who follow our Party, although our numbers are modest, we represent the interests of the majority. I'm not alone. Here's my party, my class and this is my family, my people.

A Proud Communist

FRANCE: Teachers' Strike in 130 Cities Against Gov't Cuts

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ready led to a 30% relative fall in pensions as against wages. Air France and rail-worker unions have joined the strike call.

While it's necessary to fight against job cuts and for decent pensions, as long as capitalism exists so will the bosses' drive to increase exploitation and launch imperialist wars. That's why workers here and worldwide must go beyond struggles to "reform" capitalism and organize for communist revolution to destroy capitalism. ✪

LETTERS

Solidarity on May Day

My family and I, along with a close friend, attended a May Day dinner in our community on April 26. A political skit based on communist analysis of the U.S. presidential race introduced an evening of personal stories about organizing for revolution and the history of the communist movement since Haymarket. We listened to a dramatic poetry reading and a call to expand the distribution of CHALLENGE-DESAFIO. Our voices rang through the neighborhood as we joined in singing the "Internationale" and "Bella Ciao."

We had the chance to renew old contacts and meet new comrades and friends. A Latina woman attending a PLP event for the first time said, "I never knew a white person could be so revolutionary".

The next day, my African-American friend called to tell me how impressed she was with the celebration. Commenting on the stories told by a Latina immigrant of the horrors faced in coming to the U.S. without papers, she said, "We are starting from a small group, but with the multi-racial unity we saw last night we can organize much bigger displays of solidarity with all workers, black, Latin, and white. We can defeat the [capitalist] media campaign to keep us divided!"

ON TO MAY DAY 2009

ALL POWER TO THE WORKING CLASS

-West Coast comrade

FASCIST PARTY OUT IN PARAGUAY, BUT CAPITALISM REMAINS WITH A LIBERAL FACE



Ex-Bishop Fernando Lugo won the presidential elections in Paraguay, ending the 61-year reign of the fascist Colorado Party. Lugo won with the help of the Patriotic Alliance for Change, including the center-right Liberal Party, center-left parties, as well as several socialist parties including PMAS (Party of the Movement Towards Socialism, Hugo Chavez' allies) and several social movements of farmers and indigenous groups (including Tekojoja).

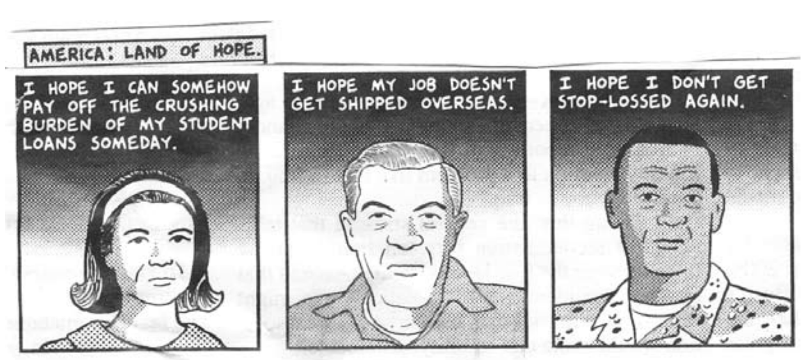
Many workers and activists believe that the working class will benefit from this ouster of Colorado. Not true! Lugo's win signals a change in the style of the oppressor, nothing more. His politics resemble those of Chavez in Venezuela and Lula in Brazil, who have the image of being pro-working class, but are really just another face of the ruling class. Lugo owes a debt to many capitalist elements among his allies in the Patriotic Alliance for Change and is not likely to be able to even accomplish modest reforms. Face it — capitalism is bigger than any one candidate, no matter how sincere he or she may be about social change. It's the same in the U.S. with Obama, Clinton and McCain. Rather than build illusions in the system, workers and activists should follow the policy of "Don't Vote! Revolt!"

The big issue that Lugo will take on is renegotiating contracts involving two hydroelectric plants — Itaipu (with Brazil) and Yacyreta (with Argentina). The Paraguayan government receives less than the typical world price for the electricity they sell and Lugo has promised that the revenue received from better deals with Brazil and Argentina will help fund social programs, including health care. (Dengue and yellow fever are now common in Paraguay). We have seen, however, time after time, that such reform promises rapidly go out the window after a "reformer" is elected, as the ruling capitalist class asserts its needs over those of the masses.

Immediately after winning the election, Lugo spoke with Hugo Chavez and said that he intends to join UNASUR, an economic bloc formed by Chavez. Then he declared his desire to meet with China, signaling an opening to Chinese imperialism to play off against U.S. imperialism and curry favor with his socialist backers in the Patriotic Union for Change. But trading one imperialist for another is not progress!

Paraguay is a geopolitically strategic country finding itself between Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Bolivia, while at the same time sitting on top of one of the world's largest supplies of fresh water — the Guarani Aquifer. Many large and small imperialists, including Brazil, the U.S., Venezuela, China and the European Union, want a piece of Paraguay's resources and labor! Instead of playing ball with imperialists, revolutionary workers should break with all politicians and build the PLP, an independent revolutionary communist party that calls for the complete destruction of capitalism. No deals — Lugo is just another puppet of the capitalists and their elites — Workers must build the PLP and make revolution if the future is going to be bright! ✪





Below are excerpts from mainstream newspapers that may be of use for our readers. Abbreviations: NYT=New York Times, GW=Guardian Weekly, LAT=Los Angeles Times

Israel hero sees why Arabs fight

Were he an Arab leader, David Ben-Gurion once confessed to the Zionist official Nahum Goldmann, he, too, would wage perpetual war with Israel. "Sure, God promised it to us, but what does that matter to them?" he asked. "There has been anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They only see one thing: We have come here and stolen their country." (NYT, 5/4)

Liberals front for warmakers

…Left-liberals such as Michael Ignatieff and Paul Berman are not much more than camp followers of the Bush administration. "America's liberal armchair warriors… are the 'useful idiots' of the war on terror." "…In today's America, neoconservatives generate brutish policies for which liberals provide the ethical fig-leaf. There really is no other difference between them." (GW, 5/9)

Drug arrests: blatantly racist

Between 1980 and 2003, drug arrests for African-Americans in the nation's largest cities rose at three times the rate for whites, a disparity "not explained by corresponding changes in rates of drug use…"

Black men are nearly 12 times as likely to be imprisioned for drug convictions as adult white men.

Underscoring law enforcement's misguided priorities, fully 4 in 10 of all drug arrests were for marijuana possesion. Those who favor continuing these policies have not met their burden of proving their efficacy in fighting crime. (NYT, 5/10)

U.S. runs killers in Afghanistan

A special investigator for the United Nations on Thursday accused foreign intelligence agencies of conducting nighttime raids and killing civilians in Afghanistan with impunity.

…He was accusing the Central Intelligence Agency or American unconventional-warfare units of operating without accountability to the Afghan government or the foreign military command in the country.

"It is absolutely unacceptable for heavily armed internationals accompanied by heavily armed Afghan forces to be wandering around conducting dangerous raids that too often result in killings without anyone taking responsibility for them," he said in his report. (NYT, 5/16)

India: U.S. polluter won't clean up

Hundreds of children are still being born with birth defects as a result of the world's worst industrial disaster 23 years ago in the central Indian town fo Bhopal.

…Children's growth had been stunted, said campaigners, because there has been no clean-up of the Bhopal plant…

The disused Union Carbide factory contains about 8,000 tonnes of carcinogenic chemicals that continue to leach out and contaminate water supplies used by 30,000 people.

Dow Chemical, which bought Union Carbide in 2001, says that because the plant is on government land it is up to the state to clean it up. (GW, 5/9)

Generation has no American dream

This is a generation that is in danger of being left out of the American dream — the first American generation to do less well economically than their parents. And that economic uncertainty appears to have played a big role in shaping their views of government and politics.

…Americans in this age group are faced with a variety of challenges that are tougher than those faced by young adults over the past few decades. Among the challenges are worsening job prospects… The top five occupations in terms of anticipated job growth: registered nurses, retail sales, customer service reps, food preparers and office clerks.

It's not hard to understand why surveys show that overwhelming percentages of Americans believe the country is on the wrong track. The American dream is on life support. (NYT, 5/13)

Civil War's Hidden History: Women Workers Battled Gov't, Bosses

A People's History of The Civil War, by David Williams (published by The New Press, 2005), reveals that the U.S. Civil War was shaped, at least in part, by the resistance of the soldiers, the anti-war sentiments of the general population and the militancy of women workers, blacks, whites and native Americans. Williams' thesis is that class struggle — the consolidation of finance capital vs. the response of working folks — comprises the source of the conflict.

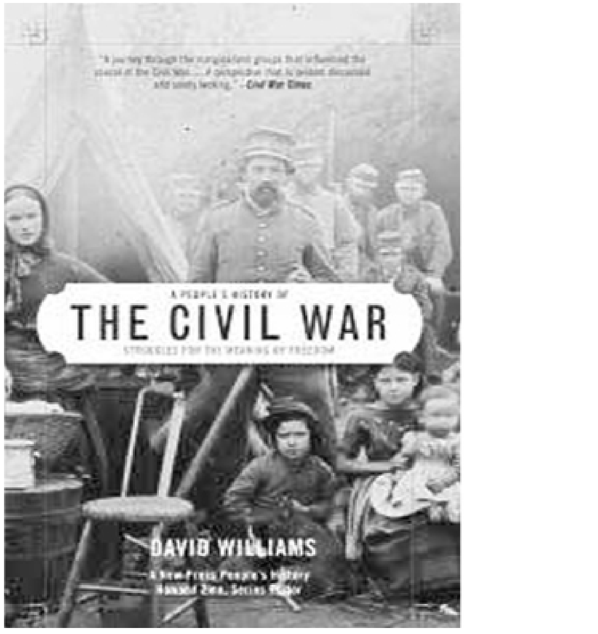
At the height of the war, women organized for higher wages with strikes and rose up against stores and government warehouses with armed struggle. Women of both the north and south began by raising their demands with petitions and delegations to Presidents Davis and Lincoln. Seamstresses from Montgomery, Alabama, wrote that as government workers, they needed more for their labors or they would perish on the $12-a-week allotment. Representatives of 10,000 seamstresses in Philadelphia called on Lincoln at the White House. All Lincoln did was ask the Quartermaster Dept. to make sure they got "the wages ordinarily paid," but the wages women got hardly provided a living.

Lacking help from either government, Confederate or Union, women began taking action for better pay and working conditions. In October 1863 a union of 1,000 female umbrella sewers in NYC and Brooklyn went on strike. They were working 18 hours a day for 6-8 cents per umbrella. In munitions factories women worked under murderous conditions: 19 killed at the Washington Arsenal; 15 in Jackson, Mississippi; 32 in a Virginia cartridge factory; and in a Richmond ordnance factory explosion 50 women died. In Augusta's gunpowder works, women walked out in Oct. '64; at Richmond's govt. arsenal, 300 women went on strike.

With Southern plantations growing profitable tobacco and cotton instead of food, small farm families were taxed to supply the army. Upon losing their husbands, brothers and sons in the army, poor southern women in particular became desperate to feed their children. In Greenville, Alabama, twenty women shouting "salt or blood" raided the depot and took what they needed. High prices were driven even higher by speculation. In Richmond, over a thousand women smashed shop doors and looted until President Davis himself came to the scene and threatened to have them shot. In Mobile, dozens of women bearing axes, hatchets and hammers ransacked grocery stores, carrying banners, "Bread or Blood." In Lafayette, women armed with guns, pistols and knives marched on a grist mill and took what they wanted.

In the North, women took to the streets as well, but to fight the draft. Poor men could not afford the wealthy men's way out of the war: $10,000 to hire a substitute. In Port Washington, LI, women led 1,000 protesters with a banner NO DRAFT, attacked the draft commissioner and broke up the draft box. In NYC, women took part in draft rebellions, grabbed stones and used their stockings as sling-shots.

These inspiring stories of our history comprise a small part of Williams' research on how the on-



set of the war and starvation of soldiers and their families was deliberate by Lincoln and his Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton. Part two of this review will reveal that Williams himself did not give up on peaceful change through the ballot box. Yet he documents well how votes for Lincoln's second term were manipulated and that legislation passed during Lincoln's watch fed only the hunger of the growing wealthy class for land and centralized banking.✪

U.S. Oil War Sends Vets Back Jobless, Homeless, Suicidal and Dead

Politicians in both parties are constantly waving the flag over the dead and wounded bodies of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, boasting about the "outstanding job" they're doing, after having been put "in harm's way" by the ruling class's vicious imperialist war for control of Mid-East oil.

These vets are workers, so the "harm's way" doesn't stop when they return — IF they return — to be attacked by a capitalist class which forces workers to pay even more for their economic meltdown and wars.

The Wall Street Journal (WSJ, 3/25) and the Boston Globe report surging joblessness, low wages, inadequate and denial of medical treatment and huge homelessness.

The military paper "Stars and Stripes" cited a U.S. Veterans Affairs Dept. study reporting 18% of veterans being jobless.

One quarter of all vets are earning less than $21,840 per year.

The WSJ wrote, "The [above] report found that most of the returning veterans were unable to find civilian jobs that matched their previous military occupations." So much for the recruiters' promises of joining the army and "learning a skill."

The Military.com website released a survey showing 81% of discharged vets did not "feel fully prepared… [to] enter the job market." According to Black Veterans for Social Justice, "Typically… young adults who go into the military at 17 or 18, when they return home, the same kind of economic conditions that forced them [to enlist] …still exist or have gotten worse." (OneWorld News service, Nov. 2007) And that's what the still-to-be-passed DREAM Act (supported by the liberals and the Pentagon) has in store for immigrant youth who join the military if they come home alive — an economy of rising unemployment, sinking wages and racism on all fronts especially affecting black, Latino and immigrant youth. Talk about "harm's way"!

To make job matters worse, the percentage of amputees is the highest since the U.S. Civil War. Up to 36% of the 1.5 million veterans of the current wars are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder — an astounding half a million patients! Outstanding claims by vets rose from 254,000 to 378,000 between 2003 and 2006. Average waiting time for treatment is 183 days.

Is it any wonder that 1,784 returning vets committed suicide in 2005 alone?

Finally, "194,254… [are] homeless…on any given night." (Boston Globe, quoting The Alliance to End Homelessness)

These are the fruits of imperialist war. The bosses send youth off to oil-rich lands to kill other youth, and workers — over a million in Iraq — only to send 4,000 back (plus 500 from the Afghan war) in body bags and tens of thousands suffering amputated arms and legs, brains shattered by explosions and post-traumatic stress, racist police terror, jobless or earning poverty wages and living on the streets.

However, working-class youth will continue to join the military, and eventually millions will be forced into the armed forces when the rulers bring back some form of the draft to wage their wider wars against their imperialist rivals

So organizing for revolution among soldiers and vets, not voting for these bosses' hypocritical, disgusting politicians, is the road to follow.✪

U.S. WAR CASUALTIES: 655,000 AND RISING

An April 17 RAND Corporation study as detailed in "CounterPunch Diary" (5/2) by Alexander Cockburn, reports that, "The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have thus far produced 300,000 psychological casualties, 320,000 brain injury casualties, plus 35,000 (probably understated) officially reported 'normal' casualties. This adds up to 655,000 US casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, and average of just under 101,000 Americans killed or wounded every year since the wars began." This excludes the million Iraqi; dead from U.S. imperialism's invasion. Talk about blood for oil! ✪